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REFUGEES REPORT URANIUM MINING IN BULGARIA,
DISCUSS INTERNAL UNREST

Within the last 2 months, Yugoslav border guards have admitted to the country about 300 Bulgarian refugees, and the flow still continues. Most of these refugees are from Vidin and Kula in western Bulgaria. Most of them are peasants who in Bulgaria owned 2 to 5 hectares of land; very few of them are industrial workers or artisans; none are capitalists or large landowners. These refugees, who cross the border in groups of 30 to 40, are all men, some of them youths who were called to the army before the proper time, some admittedly members of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Organization.

According to these refugees, the greatest affliction of the Bulgarian peasant is the forcible application by the Bulgarian Communists of the collective agricultural system practiced in the USSR. Peasants who do not place at the government's disposal all their land and equipment and who object to taking part in collective efforts are threatened with deportation or are actually deported. These refugees claim that armed Communists, in cooperation with the secret police, raid villages and storehouses and burn them down. One 38-year-old Bulgarian, admittedly a member of the Communist Party at one time, said he was expelled from the party because he objected to the forcible collection of grain. In many places the peasants are forced to purchase grain on the black market at high prices and then turn it over to the government to satisfy the Communist officials. Many families write their sons who are in the military service to spend their leaves elsewhere because there is no food for them at home.

These refugees confirmed the existence of a uranium mine in Bulgaria and the fact that it is being operated for the USSR. One young Bulgarian railway employee reports that he personally worked in the uranium mine at Bukhovo, which is 25 kilometers from Sofia. He reports that at the mine 3,000 civilians and 1,500 prisoners worked three 8-hour shifts. The same individual reports that the food of the average laborer there is very poor, and that new workers are continually sent there to replace those who have to drop out. The uranium ore extracted from the mine is loaded into freight cars in a nearby station under very strict supervision and the cars head for the USSR at night. He claims that 60 carloads are sent to the USSR every night.

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The refugees report that one of the chief reasons for the unrest and dissatisfaction among the people in the border area is their constant forced employment on military projects. For example, they are forced to dig skirmishers' trenches along the border. In these areas military units are taking over school buildings and other suitable buildings. At present, four classes of males aged 20 to 24 are under arms. The 25-kilometer-deep forbidden zone along the Bulgarian border may be entered by special permit only. The refugees also report that since last August, the Bulgarian security organization has been removing and deporting to other areas all families it deems suspicious. These families are allowed to take with them only the belongings they can carry in their hands.

These refugees have only general information about the extent of Soviet interference in the internal Bulgarian administration, but two Bulgarians who served in the army and worked on the border fortifications claim that all fortification affairs are being directed by Soviet engineers wearing civilian clothing. Another refugee reports that a ferryboat arrives at Vidin each day from the Rumanian side of the Danube, loads Bulgarian grain, and departs that night for the USSR. He says that on the return trip the vessel discharges arms at Vidin. Speaking of the same matter, another Bulgarian refugee stated that the Bulgarians know perfectly well that the arms came from the USSR and also that the tanks which appear in the villages have not been brought to the country to plow Bulgarian soil. All the refugees agree that feverish military preparations are being made in the Bulgarian border zones, although they do not know whether this activity is purely defensive or is for purposes of aggression, possibly an attack on Yugoslavia.

As was pointed out above, most of these refugees come from the towns of Vidin and Kula. When the flight to Yugoslavia began, Premier Chervenkov sent a circular to the Kula Communist organization in which he charged that the Kula group had acted contrary to the desires and directives of the government and the party and was responsible for disrupting food and agricultural affairs in the Kula area. Only a year before, Sofia had praised this group highly and held it up as a model throughout Bulgaria. The Sofia Communists, seeing the unrest of the Bulgarian peasant, have begun to change their tone and now invite the peasant in conciliatory terms to participate in collective agriculture. In a recent article appearing in the Sofia newspaper Rabotnichesko Delo, the peasants were invited to "volunteer."

Almost all reports emanating from the Balkans recently have mentioned secret resistance activities. Two of the Bulgarian refugees report that in the Sliven area in eastern Bulgaria, about 500 anti-Communist guerrillas are operating in the mountains and that they are well equipped with machine guns. According to these refugees, the group is led by the son of onetime Bulgarian Premier and Agrarian Party chieftain Stamboliski.

The Yugoslav authorities are quite aware of the possibility that the Bulgarians are copying the German methods used in World War II and have infiltrated their own agents among these refugees. The latter, on arriving in Yugoslavia, are screened in a special camp at Nis, after which those considered reliable are given work. However, even then they are under continuous supervision. It may also be mentioned that the Yugoslavs for their own purposes are sending back into Bulgaria certain individuals selected from among these refugees.

Due to the shortage of labor in Yugoslavia, the refugees have no difficulty in obtaining jobs either in agriculture or industry, for which they are paid the same wages as Yugoslav workers. -- Sevkett Dilmac

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